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How Cinderella Became a Queen: Theorizing Radical Status Change

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Abstract

Using a case study of the Italian spirit grappa, we examine status recategorization—the vertical extension and reclassification of an entire market category. Grappa was historically a low-status product, but in the 1970s one regional distiller took steps that led to a radical break from its traditional image, so that in just over a decade high-quality grappa became an exemplar of cultured Italian lifestyle and held a market position in the same class as cognac and whisky. We use this context to articulate ''theorization by allusion,'' which occurs through three mechanisms: category detachment—distancing a social object from its existing category; category emulation—presenting that object so that it hints at the practices of a high-status category; and category sublimation—shifting from local, field-specific references to broader, societal-level frames. This novel theorization is particularly appropriate for explaining change from low to high status because it avoids resistance to and contestation of such change (by customers, media, and other sources) as a result of status imperatives, which may be especially strong in mature fields. Unlike prior studies that have examined the status of organizations within a category, ours foregrounds shifts in the status and social meaning of a market category itself.

Keywords: institutional change, recategorization, product market status, status elevation, status imperative, category extension, categorical dynamics, Italy

In 1974, Giannola Nonino, a regional producer of the Italian distilled beverage grappa who six years earlier had unsuccessfully attempted to launch an upgraded version of this spirit, repeated the attempt and failed anew. Two similar attempts in the early and mid-1970s by different grappa distillers also failed and in one case led to bankruptcy. These four failures confirmed the assessment by renowned journalist and author Martegani (1968: 16, 18) that grappa's name ''was its main handicap'' and the reason why ''every disinterested attempt to change it has fallen on deaf ears.'' Grappa was known as a coarse

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spirit consumed ''at the margin of society'' by peasants and alpine soldiers (Solari, 2007: 337) and was associated with artisanal and even clandestine production in hidden shacks or woodlands (Wilson and West, 1981). At the time, artisanal family firms were considered primitive—paradoxical in a country that about 15 years later would give rise to the Slow Food Movement that praised such organizations.

In the 1970s grappa was rooted at the lowest level of the wider class of spirits in which foreign categories—cognac and whisky—monopolized positions of high status (Martegani, 1968), a hierarchy reinforced by an institutional infrastructure of producers, suppliers, distributors, and consumers, and by constraining social practices. Grappa was perceived as being unworthy of comparison with foreign spirits because they were accorded a distinctly higher status. In Negro, Hannan, and Rao's (2010: 1400) terms, there was high ''intensional consensus'' that grappa was the lowest category of spirits. Hence, despite her use of pomace (pulp, skins, and seeds) from the luxury Picolit grape and of small, hand-blown Venetian-designed bottles, Giannola Nonino's 1974 attempt to sell Grappa di Picolit for 8,000 Italian lire for a 25cl flagon, about 12 times the going price, was received with scorn and laughter.

Only four years later, in 1978, the very same Grappa di Picolit was selling for 26,000 lire, an increase in real terms of 70 percent over its 1974 price and 25 times higher than other existing offerings. Renowned food and wine critic Luigi Veronelli (1978: 54) described this product as ''splendid . . . with unequalled qualities of eurythmic composition and elegance,'' an assessment echoed by the equally well-known and respected journalist Gianni Brera (1979) who, despite remembering the traditionally ''plebeian'' image of grappa and its producers, praised Grappa di Picolit's ''most serene and noble flairs.'' As the Noninos achieved success, other artisanal distillers produced their versions of premium quality grappa and were also successful. Such was the shift in attitude that by the late 1980s the traditional image of grappa—that of being ''coarse, earthy, a man's drink,'' as defined by wine and food journalist Jane Nickerson in 1955 (Felten, 2007), and as being found only in ''greasy spoons'' (Filippi, 1987: 73)—had been broken. Distillers sold grappa across a wide price range, like the range for all spirits, and high-quality premium grappa had supplanted cognac and whisky as the preferred spirit and ascended into high-culture social gatherings (Venturini, 1987). Artisanal family producers of grappa were no longer dismissed as embarrassing but were fêted as exemplars of cultured Italian lifestyle. Premium grappa had been recategorized into the same class as cognac and whisky, and the pejorative distinction between low-status domestic and high-status foreign spirits had been dissolved. Thanks to the success of its premium subcategory, the grappa category as a whole was now classified alongside the other spirits.

All of this occurred without any technological or process innovations for the improvement of quality. The Noninos used the same artisanal production methods in 1978 as for their 1974 failure, methods that were very similar to those of the other failed attempts. As Giannola Nonino put it, ''We ennobled the family product, born poor, without disnaturing it!'' (e-mail, July 7, 2015). Industry expert Luigi Odello recognized the lack ''of any technical innovation'' (e-mail, June 6, 2015) and was surprised by the Noninos' success because the Picolit grape ''is not even particularly suitable to make grappa'' (interview, November 12, 2009). Indeed, critics insisted that traditional artisanal production methods

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should be used to preserve the ''character'' of grappa (Veronelli, 1978: 10). As Zatterin (1978: 5) wrote, ''Virtue lies among those artisanal producers . . . who distil pomace just from the press, as the peasant does, but without his technical crudeness, and that do not try to imitate foreign competitors by smoothing the taste through aging and adding aromas, but preserve its original and naïve personality, burning in taste, to drink in small sips or in one shot.''

The grappa story is theoretically interesting because, although the importance of status is recognized in organization theory (Podolny, 1993, 1994; for reviews, see Jensen, Kim, and Kim, 2011; Sauder, Lynn, and Podolny, 2012), its connection to the category literature has been selective. Changes in the status, valuation, and social meaning of a market category, and of the organizations associated with that category, have not yet been investigated even though studies have shown that status orders have significant consequences (Bitektine, 2011; Jensen and Kim, 2015). As Sharkey (2014) pointed out, the literature has been restricted to describing shifts in the status of organizations within categories. Recategorization of an entire category through vertical status extension and/or reclassification into a higher status class, involving the displacement of deeply institutionalized cognitive understandings along with their associated sociocultural practices, has been neglected not least, as Durand and Paolella (2013: 1109) noted, because the categorization literature ''has overemphasized the stability of categories and the inertia of classificatory systems, overlooking category dynamics and their development and evolution'' (see also Lounsbury and Rao, 2004; Kennedy and Fiss, 2013; Piazza and Castellucci, 2014). To better understand the dramatic status change of a category, as occurred with grappa, we foreground the status dimension of category systems and in particular the status of the category within which an organization is embedded. We treat change in the status of a category as our dependent variable and ask how a low-status category can change its meaning and achieve high status. We offer an empirical account of how the subcategory of high-priced premium grappa was successfully theorized so that not only did the subcategory achieve legitimation, but the cultural meaning attached to the grappa category as a whole was changed.

CATEGORY EXTENSIONS AND STATUS ORDERING

Categories, according to Lamont and Molnar (2002: 168), are socially constructed labels that differentiate ''objects, people, practices, and even time and space.'' They simplify complex situations by delimiting how attention is to be allocated and how information is to be selected and understood (Lounsbury and Rao, 2004). In organization theory the ''dominant view'' (Durand and Paolella, 2013: 1106) of categorization is based on prototype theory (Rosch, 1973, 1975; Rosch and Mervis, 1981), according to which ''elements that entities hold in common with one or more others constitute category prototypes (i.e., typical members) for audiences. Possessing more (or fewer) of these features or elements . . . makes it possible to categorize an entity more (or less) securely in that category'' (Durand and Paolella, 2013: 1101). In this sense, categories provide cognitive boundaries around and between clusters of social objects that share a ''family resemblance'' (Rosch and Mervis, 1975), such as categories of restaurants, for example, Italian or Chinese. Categories are linked together in increasingly more encompassing superordinate categories (or

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classes), such as ''ethnic'' (which would encompass Italian and Chinese), ''fast food,'' and ''vegetarian,'' which in turn are all within the class of ''restaurants'' (Haack, Pfarrer, and Scherer, 2014).

According to a different approach, also developed within cognitive psychology but essential to an institutional understanding, categories are seen as an ongoing display of increasing abstraction, i.e., of ''category extension'' (Hofstadter and Sander, 2013: 187), whereby a category grows horizontally to encompass new sets of situations and acquires different meanings reflected and reproduced through socio-cultural practices. Hofstadter and Sander used the example of ordering a ''coffee,'' which in English can have the minimal meaning of ordering a cup of brewed coffee; this is the least abstract definition of the coffee category—*coffee1* (Hofstadter and Sander, 2013: 194). An extended and more abstract definition—*coffee2*—would include in the term ''coffee'' such beverages as macchiato and cappuccino. An additional level of abstraction—*coffee3*—occurs in the phrase ''Let's go out for a coffee,'' which could imply ordering tea or a small snack and could mean ''chatting while eating or drinking something light'' (Hofstadter and Sander, 2013: 185). In other words, higher levels of abstraction (category extensions) of *coffee2* and *coffee3* introduce into the meaning of ''coffee'' a more extended typology of products and an array of the social practices associated with them.

This theme of horizontal category extension is characteristic of the institutional approach. From this perspective, a category's meaning is derived not solely from consensus over its definitional properties (as in prototype theory) but also from the social and cultural practices and behaviors associated with it and that give it expression (Khaire and Wadhwani, 2010; Delmestri and Wezel, 2011; Durand and Paolella, 2013). From an institutional view, in other words, ''categorizing is not purely cognitive, but socio-cultural as well because it is anchored in the context in which categorization occurs'' (Glynn and Navis, 2013: 6).

Practices also express and contribute to the social valuation of a category—and of the category's members—within a vertically ordered social space (Bourdieu, 1984, cited by Lamont, 2012). Engaging in practices associated with specific products that signal a particular taste is a means by which actors occupy and display a specific position within the hierarchical structure of a field (Bourdieu, 1984). Hence, by associating products with certain practices, actors can effect a change in the symbolic status order within the field if that association is considered legitimate. For example, champagne can be cognitively defined as an alcoholic drink from a certain region, produced in a certain way, that has a distinctive color, fizz, and taste. But champagne is also associated with particular socio-cultural behaviors and practices, such as happiness, gaiety, and success; with certain social classes and lifestyles, visibly expressed and reinforced through widespread use at celebrations such as weddings, births, and awards; and by its absence from other social occasions such as supporters' celebrations of soccer victories (where beer is more commonly found). These wider socio-cultural associations and practices are important components not only of a category's institutional meaning but also of its value and thus its status, and through them those meanings become represented and socially maintained. Toasting newlyweds with bottles of beer at a wedding would represent a change in the rank order of the product, the associated practices, and the actors performing them.

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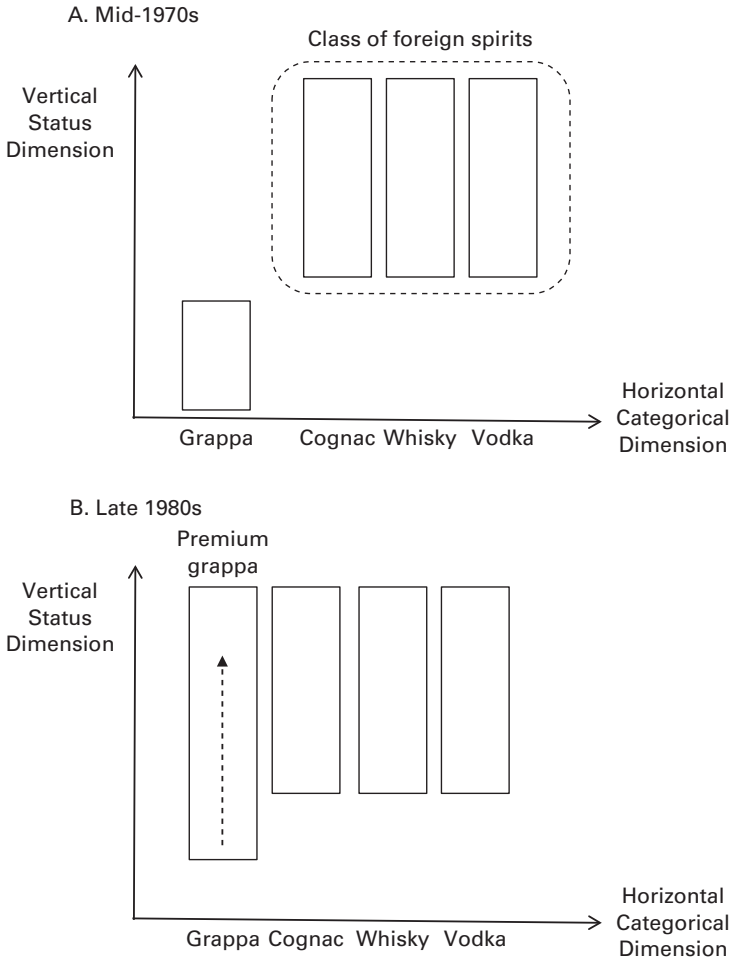
Hence, and importantly, categories are not only horizontally constituted within systems of classification—as, for example, grappa, cognac, and brandy are categories within the broader class of spirits, and as artisans and mass producers are categories of distillers—they are also vertically connected through status orders (hierarchies). For example, the grappa category and its artisanal producers were once of distinctly lower status than the categories of cognac and whisky, as depicted in figure 1.A.[1]

Status ordering has been widely addressed in sociology, psychology, and economics, especially with regard to social categories such as women vs. men or illegal immigrants vs. citizens (for a review, see Berger, Ridgeway, and Zelditch, 2002). In that literature, a central issue in defining the value of categories is how they fit in one or several hierarchies. For example, ''determining

Figure 1. Category positions in the superordinate class of spirits in the Italian market.



[1] The figure is a modification of Jensen, Kim, and Kim's (2011: 93) status-identity framework.

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whether Italians and Jews are black or white'' was fundamental to defining ''their relative positioning'' within the American racial order (Lamont, 2012: 206). In organization theory, by contrast, the status ordering of categories has been largely overlooked (Chen et al., 2012; Piazza and Castellucci, 2014), as research has heavily focused on the horizontal dimension (e.g., Lounsbury and Rao, 2004; although see Jensen, 2010). As Sharkey (2014: 1381) concluded, ''knowledge of how status influences market outcomes is based primarily on insights gleaned from empirical analyses of groups of organizations engaged in similar activities, such as banking (Jensen, 2003) or wine production (Benjamin and Podolny, 1999; Zhao and Zhou, 2011).''

Jensen, Kim, and Kim (2011: 108), reflecting on Carroll and Swaminathan's (2000) study on microbreweries and their products, touched on the vertical and horizontal aspects of categorization: ''The microbrewing category is a new horizontal product category that encompasses different product characteristics including natural ingredients and traditional brewing methods, but it could also be viewed as a new vertical status category that positions microbreweries and specialty beers above the major breweries and mass-market beers.'' Despite this early insight, Jensen, Kim, and Kim (2011) turned their attention to the status order of organizational members within a category (e.g., individual retail banks) rather than of the categories themselves (e.g., retail banks and investment banks), and the treatment of a status order as a dependent variable remains overlooked. This lack of attention to how and why vertical status change might occur is unfortunate given the profound social consequences that might follow. For example, the shift of business schools from trade schools to prestigious research institutions was a status recategorization that changed the landscape of higher education (Khurana, 2010), and the barber surgeon moved from being viewed as contaminated because of ''contact with blood or body fluids'' to being an elite healthcare professional (Bagwell, 2005: 872). As Kennedy, Lo, and Lounsbury (2010: 392) pointed out, ''Changes in the meaning of the various categories used to understand the world are essential to stories of epic changes in science, technology, and society more generally.'' Given these consequences, it follows that change along the vertical dimension of a category is potentially as important as change along the horizontal dimension.

Status orders are particularly difficult to change (Lounsbury and Rao, 2004; Washington and Zajac, 2005; Malter, 2014) not only because of their underlying cognitive and cultural imperatives but also because ''status maintenance concerns are central'' to organizations and markets (Blader and Chen, 2011: 1041; see also Malter, 2014). There is, in effect, a status imperative that applies both to organizations and to categories or classes. As Chen and colleagues (2012: 302) pointed out, ''once a status hierarchy is established, it tends to remain and be self-sustaining.'' Ivy League schools in the U.S., for example, have retained their prominence as a category. So too have the Magic Circle of UK law firms and the Big Four international accounting firms. Oxbridge and elite ''public schools'' such as Eton and Harrow in the UK, and the Grande Écoles—a category of higher education institutions in France—have similarly retained their privilege and prestige for centuries (Kodeih and Greenwood, 2014). Malter (2014) noted that the grand cru classification of the Médoc, five growth classes of wine producers, has remained virtually unchanged for 150 years.

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Yet, as our grappa example illustrates, categories and their vertical status are not static. Change occurs. Nevertheless, though recent work has begun to explore status dynamics along the horizontal dimension of figure 1.A, especially those dynamics related to the emergence and impact of new categories (e.g., Weber, Heinze, and DeSoucey, 2008; Khaire and Wadhwani, 2010; Navis and Glynn, 2010; Jones et al., 2012), status change involving mature categories remains largely neglected. We ''know little about how status dynamics occur'' (Piazza and Castellucci, 2014: 309) and thus lack ''coherent theories of how status changes'' (Sauder, Lynn, and Podolny, 2012: 277).

The grappa case provides an opportunity to examine radical status recategorization and is especially interesting because it runs counter to existing theory. First, it does not conform to the established idea that imperatives and social penalties enforce category status. Second, according to Hannan, Pólos, and Carroll (2007), category change is easier for those with ''fuzzy identities'' and much more difficult to accomplish if boundaries between categories are sharply defined, but grappa was universally seen as a very clearly demarcated low-status category unequivocally associated with undesirable behaviors and practices. Third, the recategorization of grappa did not, as might be extrapolated from the findings of previous studies, originate from newcomers to the field or from central players (Hardy and Maguire, 2008); change arose from the efforts of a regional—i.e., peripheral (Leblebici et al., 1991)—low-status player. For all these reasons, the grappa story represents an ideal context for theory development (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007; Siggelkow, 2007).

Our interpretation runs counter to the thesis of resource partitioning theory that has been found relevant in an apparently similar craft beer case in the United States (Carroll and Swaminathan, 2000), which says that in highly concentrated industries, generalists dominate a market and leave resource spaces that small-scale specialists can occupy and exploit. In Carroll and Swaminathan's (2000) study, over 80 percent of the market was held by the four largest firms. Similarly, in a study of resource partitioning in the Scottish whisky industry, McKendrick and Hannan (2014) found that four firms controlled between 54 and 62 percent of the market. In our case, industry concentration was significantly lower. An EU study of industry concentration in the Italian beverage industry (Balliano and Lanzetti, 1976) found that from the late 1960s to the mid-1970s (i.e., immediately preceding the status recategorization of grappa), the grappa industry was ''highly fragmented with 400 distillers'' and that the largest five firms held no more than 30 to 35 percent of the market. Interestingly, these five firms, which entered the market in the second half of the 1960s, promoted themselves as modern industrial firms in contrast to the then-prevalent artisanal family firms. The EU study also found low industry concentration for whisky and cognac but not for Italian brandy: two brandy producers had a combined 60 percent market share (but total brandy sales accounted for only 36 percent of the Italian spirits market in 1973). The rise in status of grappa, therefore, cannot be explained as a result of consolidation within the spirits industry.

A further important difference between the grappa story and that of resource partitioning is that the market position that premium grappa sought (successfully) to exploit was already occupied by premium spirits such as cognac and whisky. It was not an open resource space like that in the beer industry (Carroll and Swaminathan, 2000; see also Liu and Wezel, 2015). Moreover,

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artisanal distillers such as Nonino were not small-scale microdistillers equivalent to those established by farms, microbreweries, and small wineries in the U.S. (Saulny, 2007) but could be significant in size. Nonino, for example, became one of the largest producers without losing its identity as an artisanal distiller. It became the fifth-largest producer in 2007, with a market share of 6.42 percent, compared with the 8.78-percent market share of the largest firm. The U.S. microdistillery movement, in contrast, is more clearly a resource partitioning story in that craft-based peripheral producers occupy the resource space that dominant central firms do not (Verhaal, 2014). Finally, in the craft beer study consumers were reacting against the homogeneous product of the generalists and were appealing for change. In contrast, there was no such consumer pull factor in the grappa case—on the contrary, there was a distinct resistance to the idea of consuming grappa.

In approaching the grappa case, our starting assumption was that changes in a category's meaning and status depend on a convincing theorization (Strang and Meyer, 1993), meaning the way that proponents of change invoke ''culturally resonant claims'' (Weber, Rao, and Thomas, 2009: 111) to render ideas ''into understandable and compelling formats'' (Greenwood, Suddaby, and Hinings, 2002: 183). Theorizations are the means by which proposals for institutional change—such as radical status recategorization—earn endorsement and acceptance (Greenwood and Suddaby, 2006; Nigam and Ocasio, 2010; Phillips and Oswick, 2012). Any theorization involves specifying a general problem for which a proposed change is a solution or treatment and providing a compelling justification of that solution (Tolbert and Zucker, 1996). The form that such theorizations might take can vary (Maguire, Hardy, and Lawrence, 2004; Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005; Jones et al., 2012), and context matters. Theorizations in emerging fields, for example, differ from those in mature fields (Maguire, Hardy, and Lawrence, 2004; Jones et al., 2012; David, Sine, and Haveman, 2013), and those in professional contexts may differ from those in economic contexts: ''In economic settings . . . legitimating principles are more likely to be quasi-scientific, emphasizing the 'soundness' of ideas. In highly professionalized settings, we expect appeals to normative alignment to be more salient'' (Greenwood, Suddaby, and Hinings, 2002: 75; see also Rao, Monin, and Durand, 2003). But our understanding of theorization remains overly general. Hence our motivating question in analyzing the grappa case was what particular form of theorization enables status recategorization to occur in a mature context, and why?

METHODS

Because our purpose is theory elaboration, we used an inductive historical approach (Lee, Mitchell, and Sablynski, 1999) by analyzing a case study of the successful redefinition of a mature category. The grappa case provides an appropriate research setting because of its clearly demarcated change process. Further, the lively opposition and discourse among very different actors—ranging from distillery owners and farmers to journalists, writers, and elite wine critics—make it a revelatory and exemplary case (Yin, 2009). The case has the advantage of being well documented, and because the events were fairly recent, many of the participants are still alive and were available for interviews.

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Moreover, although we focus on the successful status change, we were able to compare that process with four previous failures.

Data Sources

Our primary data sources are extensive archival materials supplemented by interviews with key industry actors. The archival materials include the personal archives of Luigi Veronelli, ''internationally acknowledged as Italy's most celebrated wine and food critic'' (Negro, Hannan, and Rao, 2010: 1461), and of Luigi Odello, the founder of the Tasters' Study Center and the catalyst for the founding of regional associations of grappa producers, and the archives of the Nonino family. We also accessed the archives of the Istituto Nazionale Grappa, of Assodistill, and of the Centro Documentazione Grappa Luigi Bonollo. These materials generated leads to other possible archives, resulting in the collection of documentary data through a variant of the snowball interview approach. The same materials suggested important interview sources, which we pursued. We undertook extensive web searches, including examining the historical material at www.archive.org and collecting articles containing the word ''grappa'' published between 1984 and 2010 in *Il Sole 24 Ore*, the main Italian business newspaper, and *La Stampa*, a leading Italian newspaper. We created a database from the archives and interviews and classified 324 newspaper articles according to the developed categories.

We conducted 29 formal, 13 informal, and six telephone interviews supplemented by e-mail exchanges, and we visited several distilleries and attended industry presentations. A summary of those interviewed and the frequency and nature of the interactions is given in table 1. Importantly, we interviewed the Nonino family both in the early stage of the data collection process and at the end of data analysis, which allowed us to be better prepared for requesting additional materials from them.

We also collected photographic material (historical print ads and pictures of bottles, labels, and distilleries), video materials (historical advertisements and company documentaries), and historical artifacts (including the original Nonino Grappa di Picolit bottle of the 1970s and bottles of other producers). We had access to collections of historical bottles at the Distillerie Franciacorta, in the Noninos' private archives, and in several restaurants where we were allowed to take pictures.

Data Analysis

Our data analysis resembles the sequence proposed by Langley (1999). First we compiled an event history to document who did what, and when, and who said what, and when. From this analysis, we charted the chronology of the grappa story, identifying the various actors involved and the nature of their involvement. The second stage of analysis involved temporal bracketing to identify the critical junctures within the flow of events (Langley, 1999). At this point, we were primarily using the words and phrases of the interviewees and the archival materials and interrogating them through the central question motivating our study. We sought to identify tentative second-order themes that we then more explicitly explored by arranging the data around them. As our initial interpretations began to emerge, we checked for data consistency through

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Table 1. Non-archival Data Sources

Personal interviews
Giannola Nonino (2 in 1993 and 2013)*
Benito Nonino (2 in 1993 and 2013)
Antonella Nonino (2 in 2013)
Cristina Nonino (1 in 2013)
Elisabetta Nonino (1 in 2013)
Daniela Tessaro, assistant to Giannola Nonino (1 in 1993)
Renzo Snaidero, administrative employee at Nonino (1 in 1993)
Luigi Odello, founder of Tasters' Study Center (3 in 2009, 2010, 2011)
Gian Arturo Rota, GM Luigi Veronelli Editore, married Veronelli's daughter (1 in 2009)
Sandro Bottega, distiller first to imitate unique bottle designs (1 in 2010)
Giovanni Savio, PR manager Distillerie Bottega (1 in 2010)
Luigi Bonello, director Centro Documentazione Grappa (1 in 2009)
Priscilla Occhipinti, owner of Nannoni Distillerie, inventor of grappa di fattoria for Super Tuscan wines (1 in 2010)
Roberto Occhipinti, father of Priscilla Occhipinti (1 in 2010)
Roberto Zironi, head of the Department of Food Science at the University of Udine (1 in 2010)
Three barmen in Lombardy, Piedmont, and Veneto (2010)
Informal interviews
Riccardo Carelli, CEO of Alma, Scuola Internazionale di Cucina Italiana in Colorno (2011)
Marketing executive of Bormioli Rocco about glass production for spirits (2011)
Carlo Vergnano, entrepreneur and former owner of Grappa Piave (2011)
Giovanni Romano, owner of the largest historical collection of grappa bottles (2011)
Giuliano Gozio, current owner of Grappa Piave (2011)
Claudia Bellone, researcher at the AgriFood Economics Department of the University of Padua (2011)
Jacopo Poli, distiller (2011)
Bruno Pilzer, distiller (2011)
John Piggott, professor at the University of Strathclyde Glasgow and expert in spirits (2011)
Alain Bertrand, professor at the Université V. Segalen Bordeaux, Faculté d'œnologie (2011)
Luigi Gatti, consultant in the field of spirits (2011)
Guido Scialpi, journalist in the field of spirits (2011)
Paolo Marolo (2015)
Telephone interviews
Giannola Nonino (1 in 1993)
Antonella Nonino (2 in 2013)
Luigi Odello, founder of Tasters' Study Center (1 in 2013)
Elvio Bonollo, owner of Distillerie Bonollo and president of Instituto Nazionale Grappa (1 in 2013)
Daniele Pozzi, historian (1 in 2013)
E-mail exchanges
Giannola Nonino (12 exchanges with detail questions in 2013 and 2015)
Antonella Nonino (5 exchanges with detail questions in 2013 and 2015)
Luigi Odello, founder of Tasters' Study Center (6 between 2010 and 2015)
Armando Colliva Marsigli, former secretary of Instituto Nazionale Grappa (1 in 2010)
Gian Arturo Rota, GM Luigi Veronelli Editore, married Veronelli's daughter (1 in 2010)
Michael Sundman, director of business development, 1983–1989, Seagram International, acquired Grappa Piave in 1984 (1 in 2010)
Elvio Bonollo, owner of Distillerie Bonollo and president of Instituto Nazionale Grappa (1 in 2013)
Daniele Pozzi, historian (2 in 2013)
Exhibitions
Exhibition on the life of Luigi Veronelli in Bergamo (2010)
Extended exhibition on the life of Luigi Veronelli in Bergamo during EXPO 2015 (2015)
Exhibition of Grappa Pilzer in Tramin (2010)

(continued)

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Table 1. (continued)

Visits
Visit of Distillerie Nonino (1993 and 2013)
Inauguration of new distillery and exhibition Borgo S. Vitale in Franciacorta (2010)
Visit of Alma, Scuola Internazionale di Cucina Italiana in Colorno (2011)
Visit of Distillerie Bottega (2011)
Visit of Distillerie Roner's grappa exhibition (2011)
Visit of Distillerie Marolo (2015)
Presentation of findings at practitioners' workshop ''The future of spirits,'' Borgonato di Cortefranca (2011)

*In 1993 the first author visited Nonino for the sake of writing a teaching case study. The notes and materials from the visit can be found in his personal archives.

several iterations during and after data collection. These preliminary analyses led to further data collection. For example, our analysis identified previous failed attempts to elevate grappa's status, so to systematically compare these with the successful effort, we collected additional data and reexamined the data collected to that point. The second-order themes are summarized in figure 2, and illustrative evidence is given in table 2.

The third stage involved iteration between our second-order themes and extant theory (Langley, 1999), juxtaposing our data and emerging themes with existing theory so as to generate more-abstract aggregate dimensions (see figure 2). Repeated iterations prompted further data collection and analysis to clarify and confirm the emerging model. For example, because of the current orthodoxy that warns against ''heroic'' entrepreneurs (Hardy and Maguire, 2008), we verified the role of the Nonino family members who figured prominently in the interviews and the archival materials.

A particular concern was to ensure that our interpretations were sound. We triangulated data from several sources, especially by cross-referencing different archival materials. We triangulated interview data on the precise sequence of events by consulting historical documents, other published sources, and the artifacts themselves. For example, the first appearances of grappa made from the pomace of a specific wine grower and of single-grape varietal pomace are questioned even today by producers and journalists. Several distillers dismissed the idea that the Noninos were the first to associate grappa with luxury wine and, instead, named Nannoni, a distiller of pomace from Super Tuscan wines. We checked the conflicting claims and systematically tried to falsify the heroic story. We interviewed the owner–manager of Nannoni's, who confirmed that, far from being the first, she had mimicked the Noninos. Paolo Marolo, owner of a distillery founded in 1977, told us that when he produced single-grape grappa after being inspired by Nonino, a large established producer had told him that this innovation would fail within a few years. In addition to triangulating the data, we compared the successful event with four previous failed attempts. The comparison is summarized in table 3.

We used three of Lincoln and Guba's (1985) procedures for establishing the trustworthiness of qualitative data: the first author had prolonged exposure to the setting, including attendance at industry events and frequent conversations with interviewees (beyond the formal interviews); we repeatedly triangulated

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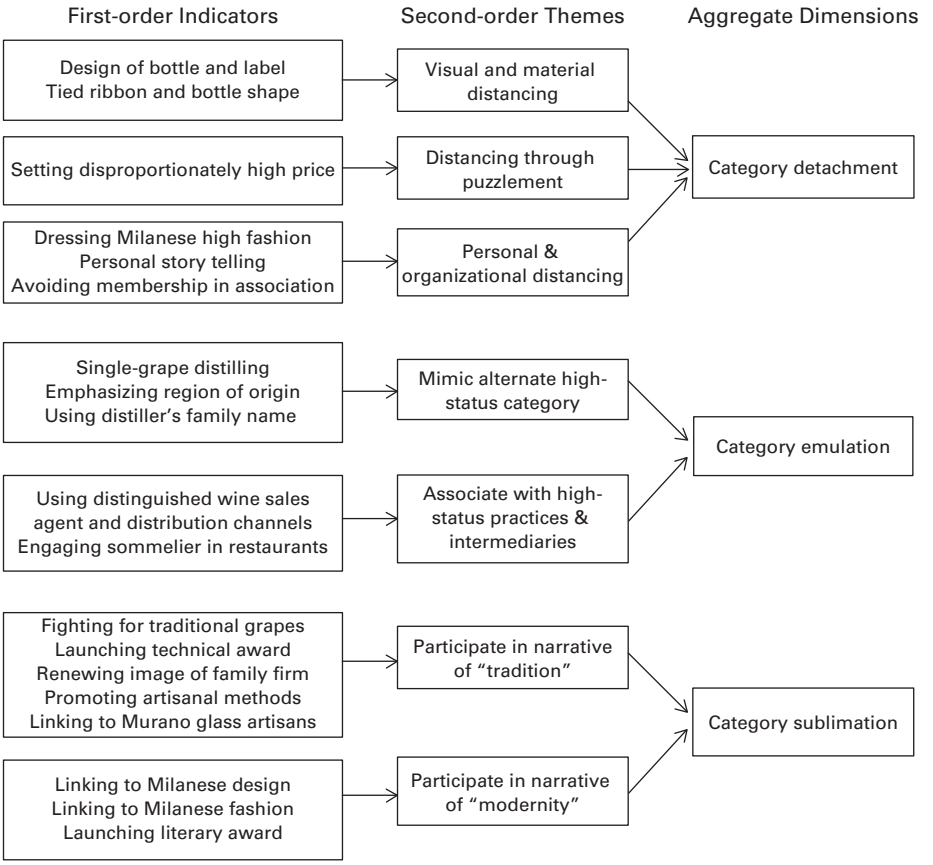
Figure 2. Final coding structure.



our data sources and collected additional material for confirmatory purposes; and we used ''member checks,'' presenting our emerging model to industry participants in verbal and written form. In addition, during data analysis our combination of insider and outsider authors provided the benefit of ''intimacy with local settings and the potential for distancing'' (Langley et al., 2013: 6).

TURNING CINDERELLA INTO A QUEEN

The modern history of grappa is of competing yet complementary attempts to improve its legitimacy and status. The earliest attempt began in the 1960s and sought to replace artisanal production with U.S.-style mass production procedures to provide a consistency of flavor and eliminate any health concerns. The strategy was to create a national spirit for a mass market through professionally managed corporations using modern technologies supplying ''more and more grappa, but always the same'' (Martegani, 1968: 133; Stock, 1978). This was not an attempt to radically raise the status of grappa but to improve its legitimacy as an acceptable drink. Producers accepted and underlined its lower status in their marketing campaigns—one advertisement, for example, pictured a woman in a mini-skirt; see image A1 in the Online Appendix (http://asq.sagepub.com/supplemental). One producer compared grappa with higher-status

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Table 2. Data Coding: Sources and Illustrations of Dimensions

Data sources	Illustrations of dimensions
	Category detachment
Personal interview	''We chose a perfume flagon.'' (Giannola Nonino, May 7, 1993)
Personal interview	''For grappa the evolution of packaging has had an enormous importance. First, because of the patent and effective declaration that also its sensory physiognomy had changed, that it was no more the spirit of the Alpine soldiers. . . . The association with hand-blown glass not only has embellished grappa, but it has also underscored its role as ambassador of *made in Italy*.'' (Odello, Nov. 14, 2009)
Newspaper database	''To reach such results grappa has changed tailor (bottles with new and stylized forms, labels studied again and again by *designers*).'' (Paolini, 1985)
Personal interview	''The only person [in the Consortium] to be respected was Marquis Margili, who had a small production of grappa, and that because of his status had been elected president of the consortium of Friulian grappa. More than once he came to our house and he also instilled in me a little fear, you know, those true noble men, and he told me 'Lady Nonino, it is not possible that you do not belong to the Consortium of Friulian grappa' and I replied 'Change the specification and we enter.' The consortium was a fraud, was the lack of transparency that continues today in the labels of grappa.'' (Giannola Nonino, April 18, 2013)
Personal interview	''I think it was Veronelli, who, from a cultural social angle, influenced Giannola. . . . For Veronelli there is only the individual and not associationism. He insisted for the individual product and not for the collective label, such as Gallo Nero [Chianti's quality label].'' (Rota, May 26, 2009)
Visuals	Comparisons of label designs (abstract and minimalist vs. rich with traditional iconic elements) and glass colors (transparent vs. traditionally dark green or brown).
Artifacts	Experiencing the process of opening the delicate 25cl flask and holding the small bottle in the palm.
Interview in archive	''I went touring for three years in the most important restaurants and hotels in order to make it known, dressing the most beautiful fashion (how many Armani and Valentino I have consumed!).'' (Turani, Feb. 24, 1985)
Article in archive	''True is that without Giannola the Nonino distilleries . . . would miss the glamor, creativity, friendliness and preciousness that has been infused by the lady.'' (Filippi, 1987)
	Category emulation
Book in archive	''Monovitigno (the term is mine and Giannola used me, and she was by far the first).'' (Veronelli, 1991: 13)
Article in archive	''Giannola told her husband: single grape grappa, that's the right idea, Benito immediately understood. 'But not any monovigno. We needed the rarest one, we needed grappa di Picolit'.'' (Amodeo, 1991)
Newspaper database	''All of a sudden, as in a fairy tale, the rapid social climb in high society: top restaurants, right circles, good homes. . . . in the past a poor spirit, today one of the most expensive pieces in delicatessen and wine shop windows.'' (Paolini, 1985)
Archive	Analysis of the sales agents' contracts in Nonino's archive: access to luxury wine agents and agreement on higher commissions for selling the monovitigno (single-grape) grappa.
Personal interview	''We didn't use liquor sellers but wine salespeople and this has opened up for us the restaurants. We required the salespersons not to offer discounts and to choose special places.'' (Giannola Nonino, May 7, 1993)
	Category sublimation
Article in archive	Veronelli, in his 1974 article in *Panorama* announcing the ''birth'' of grappa di Picolit, dedicates half of the article to making a list of the names of the individual winegrowers who delivered the pomace and, by doing so, emphasizes individuality in contrast to standardized mass production.
Visuals	Ironic/aesthetic drawing of a family tree commissioned by Nonino from the famous artist/cartoonist Altan (1987). Moreover, most of the pictures taken at the awards display the daughters of Nonino.

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(continued)

Table 2. (continued)

Data sources	Illustrations of dimensions
Archive	In the self-edited chronologies of their company, the Noninos talk of the growth of the production capacity (number of steam stills) always in conjunction with members of the family, i.e., company growth is framed along with family growth. Moreover, they put great emphasis on their role in the protection of traditional Friulian grape varietals.
Newspaper database	''Old grappa spirit of the poor and now nectar in artistic bottles.'' (Paolini, 1985)
Article in archive	''The thirty years of Monovitigno Nonino, technically created with the separate distillation of the pomace of a single vine (Picolit), are celebrated in the exhibition opened yesterday at the Trienniale Milan, the first 'that does not celebrate an artist, an architect, a designer, but a family'.'' (Bucci, 2003)
Article in archive	''In October [1984] I was in Munich and on the Marienplatz Dallmayr's shop had prepared all windows with our grappas.'' (Giannola Nonino quoted by Mura, 1989: 76)
Archive	Most of the members of the jury and of the winners of the literary awards are prominent figures in Italian enogastronomic and/or cultural circles.
Article in archive	''And you also do a literary award. Why not? At the beginning it was an award for those who rescued the best grapes from Friuli, then we transformed it in a literary award, every year we chose a foreigner and an Italian. This is also a way to gather, to have a party, to taste our food, our grappas, our Friuli.'' (Turani, 1985)
Personal interview	''Nobody bought our Grappa di Picolit. Therefore, we have given it away as a gift: to Agnelli, that later sent his driver to buy more, and to Eugenio Scalfari who wrote me a letter saying that my grappas are like Bulgari jewels.'' (Giannola Nonino, May 7, 1993)

spirits, insinuating in its ad that grappa was of the same lineage, as shown in figure 3 (and in image A2 in the Online Appendix); a vodka bottle asks a whisky bottle (referring to a bottle of grappa with a gold cap), ''My friend, do you know the blond in the sack?'' The whisky bottle replies, ''Oh, yes, yes, she belongs to the club.'' The grappa bottle thinks, ''These foreigners!!''

This modernist movement sought to promote grappa as an acceptable, cheap product and was successful in improving sales. Grappa production doubled between 1967 and 1975. Significantly, however, the price of a 75cl bottle remained within the 1,900 to 2,500 lire range. Grappa's image had become that of a standardized product with no health risks, but its low status remained unchanged: ''Grappa as a liquor was presented as strong, sharp, burning, for cold climates, for 'real men,' genuine, sincere, simple, unrefined, unsophisticated, with a low or at most medium target, but always for an 'unsophisticated' market'' (Finzi, 2007: 26). Irrespective of taste or quality, grappa was priced below all other spirits (Finzi, 2007). For example, in 1978, the mean and median prices were 4,243 lire and 3,500 lire for grappa, 10,708 and 7,500 lire for French marc, 12,562 and 12,000 lire for French calvados, and 7,412 and 6,000 for fruit spirits (Veronelli, 1978).

Birth of the Traditional Artisanal Movement

An alternative movement—led by a group of Northern Italian local politicians, journalists, writers, and small, family-owned artisanal producers—criticized mass production as a betrayal of local traditions and as producing a monotonous, plain, and flavorless grappa (for similar stories, see Carroll and Swaminathan, 2000; McKendrick and Hannan, 2014). Promoting artisanal

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Table 3. Mechanisms Employed in Failed/Successful Attempts to Introduce Premium Grappa*

	Nonino 1968	Ramazzotti 1970	Nonino 1974	Modin 1977	Nonino 1978
Mechanisms associated with success					
Category detachment					
Visual and material distancing	[x]	[x]	X		X
Distancing through puzzlement			[x]	[x]	X
Personal and organizational distancing					X
Category emulation					
Mimic alternate high-status category	[x]	[x]	X		X
Associate with high-status practices & intermediaries					X
Category sublimation					
Participate in narrative of tradition			X	[x]	X
Participate in narrative of modernity			[x]		X
Mechanisms associated with failure					
Massive use of print and TV advertisement		X			
Marketing emphasizes comparability with high-status categories in same class		X		X	
Production practices same as of high-status category in same class				X	

* [x] = partial success.

Figure 3. Attempt by a mass producer to equate grappa with foreign spirits (1970).

OH, YES, YES, APPARTIENE AL CLUB.
CUOMPAGNO! CUONOSCI QUELLA BIUONDA NEL SACCO?
(QUESTI STRANIERI!)
LANG'S
OLD
Scotch Whisky
Che cosa la fa così seducente che la si incontra a tutti i parties? Sarà perché è una bionda naturale forte e gentile? O è il suo corpo morbido e caldo? O sarà il suo profumo sottile e stimolante? O è la sua nobile origine piemontese? Non lo sappiamo. Forse è tutto questo insieme che innamora tutti. Stranieri e no.
FIOR DI VITE
GRAPPA STRAVECCHIA RAMAZZOTTI

Source: First author's archive.

methods, the traditionalists defended grappa as an acceptable and culturally valuable spirit associated with Italian subalpine culture.

Several public intellectuals were also critical of the mass-production modernist movement and linked artisanal methods with the rediscovery of local culinary and wine traditions. They emphasized that quality could not be derived from mass-production techniques and stressed that for several decades high-quality grappa had been produced by family-owned artisanal distillers (Veronelli,

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1971). Gian Arturo Rota, publisher of the leading wine guide *I Vini di Veronelli*, complained that even wine was in danger of becoming commoditized by mass producers ''whose only categories would have been red, white, and rosé'' (field notes, May 26, 2009). In resisting the trend toward mass standardization, these activists were laying the foundation for the later emergence of the Slow Food Movement, as acknowledged by Slow Food founder Petrini (2013).

Prominent journalist and broadcaster Luigi Veronelli was instrumental in the rediscovery and promotion of Italian regional traditions. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s he sought to invoke images of traditional Italian culture by reporting stories that emphasized the authenticity of local artisanal processes and the important role of family firms in preserving Italian traditions. Using bucolic images and text emphasizing tradition, local community, and place of origin, Veronelli (1971) likened grappa to whisky and cognac by their common use of artisanal traditions. In the monthly magazine *Epoca* in 1972 (original manuscript, Veronelli's archives) the journalist wrote about the ''minimal distiller'' Romano Levi: ''Taste the grappa of this creator, worthy as an artisan of the XVII century, and the memory of even the best cognac will fade.'' In this sense, Veronelli's ideas were similar to those of localism and anti-corporatism that flourished in the U.S. in the 1920s and 1930s (Ingram, Yue, and Rao, 2010).

Several regional producers were also proud of traditional artisanal processes and of the variations in taste that they produced. The Venetian distiller Modin favored an old copper distilling apparatus called an alembic modeled after distillers of French cognac (Martegani, 1968). Franco Barbero and Giovanni Bosso preferred the traditional Piedmontese bain-marie (double boiler) and claimed their grappa to be part of a forgotten heritage of the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia. In 1968 these and other artisanal distillers inaugurated the National Conference on Grappa to promote the use of discontinuous steam stills (and especially the bain-marie still of French origin) to better preserve quality and maintain the grape's original flavor. A year later the first regional quality label, the Marchio del Tridente, was instituted in Trentino.

These early efforts to improve the status of grappa failed. Not one artisanal producer, not even a member of the grappa ''aristocrazia'' endorsed by Veronelli (1971), was able to sell grappa at a premium price. And not one of the artisanal products became known beyond a small circle of distillers and aficionados (Finzi, 2007). The Modin distillery, directly copying cognac, aged its grappa Antico Alambicco for 15 years but could not sell the product, even at a price far below that which Nonino would reach a year later. Modin went bankrupt in 1977 because ''consumers were not ready to pay for grappa . . . at such high prices'' (Modin's owner, field notes, March 5, 2013). Moreover, irrespective of the quality of their grappa, few producers were optimistic of ever being able to capture a premium price given that all grappa was perceived as inferior. As the president of the Istituto Nazionale Grappa later concluded, ''Nobody imagined that single varietal grappa would have the success it is experiencing these days'' (Vie del Gusto, 2005).

The Leap for Status

The daughter of a successful entrepreneur, Giannola Bulfoni, who married Benito Nonino in 1962, was distressed by the lowly status of grappa: ''When my girlfriends invited me to dinner . . . I always took a bottle of our best grappa

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Figure 4. Traditional bottle of grappa Nonino before its recategorization attempts.

Source: Nonino archives.

as a gift. It never happened that after dinner my friends would open the bottle. Instead, they offered us vodka, or whisky. I knew that they would also offer my grappa—but to the plumber, or the baker!'' (Amodeo, 1991: 142).

Toward the end of the 1960s Giannola began the first of three attempts to alter the status of grappa despite being fully aware of the considerable difficulties involved (Compagno, 2000). The disapproval attached to grappa was deeply institutionalized and could not be avoided by simply renaming the product: a 1951 Italian law mandated that grappa distillers name their product ''acquavite di vinaccia'' or ''grappa''—both universally recognized as the names of grappa. Compounding these difficulties, the Nonino distillery was a small, relatively unknown operation in the Friulian regional market of Italy's far northeast. Martegani (1968), who was sympathetic to the artisanal philosophy, did not include the Noninos on his list of the 26 most important Italian distillers.

Despite these challenges, in 1968 the Noninos introduced a grappa distilled from pomace supplied by renowned local winegrowers. They also used a new bottle—compare figures 4 and 5 (which are images A3 and A4 in the Online Appendix)—and priced it at 5800 lire per 75cl, compared with the median for grappa of 3500 lire (in 1978 prices). But this attempt to raise the status of their grappa became the Noninos' first failure:

> I was sure that with this product [pointing at the bottle on the table] I would be able to explain that it is not true that grappa is not good. As for all things, you have good and bad ones. . . . But no, it was not taken into consideration, despite that I declared the pomace . . . was from this specific winemaker who made highly regarded wines. . . . [But] the market I aimed at didn't consider the bottle sufficiently elegant and sophisticated to be urged to taste it. . . . [The] consumer that I wanted was the

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Figure 5. Bottle used for Nonino's first failed attempt to market an upgraded version of its grappa (1968).

Source: Nonino archives.

> snobbish wife that dined in three-star French restaurants, who was used to drinking in elegant crystal glasses and to talking about what she was drinking. (Giannola Nonino, field notes, April 18, 2013)

The Noninos realized that, although they had changed how their product was presented, it was still perceived as lowly grappa and dismissed accordingly. They recognized that they had to somehow break that association and overcome the attitude of consumers who regarded whisky and cognac as being of a different class (Tiraforti, 1990). As they intensified their efforts to become members of the existing "market circle of imported spirits" (Compagno, 2000: 127), they began to conceive of grappa as a cousin of wine and to mimic its production practices. As Giannola told an interviewer,

> I always read newspapers and noticed that people didn't want to drink ordinary wine; they wanted to have "branded" drinks, produced with a specific grape, from a specific area. So I asked myself: Why don't we do the same with grappa? . . . We decided accordingly to use the Picolit grape, the most prestigious and the rarest. (Turani, 1985)

Further, they invited Veronelli and offered to dedicate to him the first distillation of the 1973 Grappa di Picolit if he would attend the distilling celebration. Impressed with "the assertiveness with which she had addressed him," and seeing her "as an ally for *his* battles," Veronelli accepted the invitation (Rota, field notes, May 26, 2009). At the celebration he acclaimed Grappa di Picolit as "reminiscent . . . of acacia honey, ripe quinces, freshly picked figs" (Virbila, 1988: 40) and in his weekly newspaper column favorably noted the similarity of the Picolit grappa taste to that of Picolit wine. In associating grappa with wine Veronelli particularly emphasized its distillation from artisanal production processes and its dialect name, which were closer to *his* interest of promoting traditional Italian culture. Unwittingly, however, in using terms such as *sgnapa* and *fiasca* (bottle in straw holder), he reinforced the image of grappa as an unsophisticated drink, undermining Giannola's purpose.

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Figure 6. Advertisement of Nonino's single-grape grappas in a new bottle (1978).

The connection to wine was furthered in three other ways: through the increasingly distinctive appearance of Grappa di Picolit, the functioning of the bottle, and the Noninos' initiation of an award for winemakers. Grappa di Picolit's appearance was again altered to make it more stylish and noticeably different from traditional presentations. Giannola commissioned an architect to design the 25cl flasks, which were then hand-blown in Murano, the historical center of Italy's glass industry. The result was a stylized bottle reminiscent of a perfume flagon, with a minimalist black and white label that reflected the wider cultural trend toward abstract branding of product names and logos, and with tiny ribbons of different colors attached to indicate different single-grape varietals—red for Picolit, green for Ribolla, and so on; see figure 6 (and images A5 and A6 in the Online Appendix). This styling not only distinguished Grappa di Picolit, it connected it to cultural expressions of high style. Further, the process of opening the delicate bottle very deliberately involved untying its red ribbon, turning the bottle upside down to allow the cork to be wetted, carefully uncorking the bottle, and pouring the spirit by holding the small bottle in the palm. This process required care and was predisposed to careful tasting and appreciation. Finally, the oenological technical award called the Nonino Risit d'Aur celebrated winemakers (but not producers of spirits) who used traditional grapes that were, at that time, unlawful in Italy because of their vulnerability to phylloxera. By implication, the Nonino name was being associated with wine and more generally with tradition and cultural practices.

Despite these efforts, the Noninos failed again to sell a single bottle of their premium-priced grappa. Moreover, established producers invoked lawsuits against the use of particular grape denominations and accused the Noninos of fraud because, they alleged, it was impossible to transfer the flavors of grapes into grappa (Nonino's archives). Nevertheless, there was a deliberate intensification of effort. The previous failures had primarily emphasized the similarity of their production processes to those of wine—especially the use of pomace from the Picolit grape—and had altered the appearance of the bottle. In their next attempt the Noninos significantly amplified these efforts, highlighting similarities between the production practices of grappa and those of French wine.

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Grappa was presented as a high-quality, single-varietal product that could be differentiated by its region of origin and by the name of the distiller. Giannola also continued to portray her husband as a skilled and dedicated artisan carefully deploying traditional technologies (using discontinuous steam stills) that would yield fresh flavors and nuances of taste. In effect, she was distancing her product from other variants of grappa and, more broadly, contrasting the authenticity of ''real'' artisanal distillers and their practices (in her view, just Nonino and a handful of others) with those of modern producers. In line with this approach, the Noninos did not join any association of grappa producers.

In addition to these amplifications of previous efforts, two new initiatives were introduced. Giannola realized that somehow she had to break into the exclusive social practices that were dismissive of grappa's status. She opposed the idea of using standard advertising and distribution channels. When she was interviewed for the newspaper *La Repubblica*, the interviewer commented on the nice room in which he was received. Nonino responded that she received people in that way because it helped establish the credibility of her story, whereas more normal channels of advertising would not convey her message: ''Advertise Grappa di Picolit? No, no. . . . I had personally to go in the most important restaurants and hotels to present and explain it'' (Turani, 1985).

Nonino's approach was to seek access to the social practices of the social elite. Drawing on her social network, Giannola, attired in high fashion, personally gave the stylized 25cl bottles as gifts to members of the Italian social and cultural elite, including Gianni Agnelli (Fiat's major shareholder), Eugenio Scalfari (founder of *La Repubblica*), Marcello Mastroianni (the star of Fellini's *La Dolce Vita*), and Indro Montanelli (Italy's most prominent post-war journalist). Giannola also successfully approached leading restaurateurs who, influenced by Veronelli, were themselves translating French nouvelle cuisine to the Italian context. Access to leading restaurateurs was possible only because of Giannola's growing social prominence in cultural circles, which she was assiduously cultivating. Both in her actions and her attire Giannola contradicted the common image of the artisanal distiller:

> I personally had to go to the top restaurateurs, dressed in new Armani fashion. And, after lunch or dinner, I took out my bottle, told the sommelier the story of Grappa di Picolit, and then asked him to taste it. . . . I thought that for the product to be known I had to start from the restaurateur, because the restaurant is the place where, if you find a sensitive sommelier, you have the chance to let him taste the grappa. If you let him taste an exquisite product he would then go to the wine shops, to the *botteghe*, to the *enoteche* [wine cellars], that were just then being founded, and he would ask for it. (Nonino, field notes, April 18, 2013)

Giannola's access to elite cultural settings was helped in 1977 when a distinguished wine sales agent agreed to represent the Nonino distillery, consolidating and widening relationships with elite restaurants and their sommeliers. Agents of other famous Italian and foreign wines—including Angelo Gaia's Barbaresco, Champagne Roederer, and Mario Schioppetto—soon followed (Nonino's archives). The use of wine agents was a deliberate choice: ''Instead of using the distribution channels of spirits, we immediately chose agents of prestigious Italian and foreign wines, the only ones who daily visited the most prestigious restaurants and wine cellars; in other words, the places where our

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jewels had to be positioned, shown and consumed'' (Nonino, e-mail, June 6, 2013).

In addition to accessing elite restaurants, the Noninos courted the wine media. In December 1974 Giannola invited Isi Benini, an important wine journalist, to attend her next ''distillation party,'' which led to a photo appearing in the newspaper *Messagero Veneto* showing Benini with Veronelli and Giannola standing in front of a clearly traditional mill. Again, the purpose was to distance Grappa di Picolit from mere grappa by redefining traditional practices as authentic rather than old fashioned and dated. In 1977 Nonino instituted a literary prize, the Premio Nonino, for Italian and (later) for international literary works that acclaimed individuality and opposition to mass consumerism and supported ''the enduring relevance of farming culture'' (Nonino, 2006: 13). The literary awards attracted immediate media interest and are still a prominent cultural event. Early recipients included Leonardo Sciascia, Jorge Amado, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Peter Brook, and Norbert Elias. Importantly, each year the ceremony foregrounds the Nonino name, thus implicitly associating it with high culture. And although there is no explicit reference to Grappa di Picolit, the hosting of the award in the Nonino distillery reminds observers that the Noninos are distillers of a premium grappa (e.g., see image A7 in the Online Appendix). Through these awards, the Noninos indirectly but carefully promoted a renewed image of artisanal tradition and of family while displaying themselves as supporters of elite cultural events. A second award initiated in 1979, for journalists who supported rural culture, was discontinued in 1982.

The effort to elevate grappa's status ''completely changed the spirits market'' (Compagno, 2000: 137). Influential wine critics and food and wine writers, several of whom acted as jurists for the Premio Nonino, wrote favorably about Grappa di Picolit, endorsing its claim to high status and applauding the contribution of family-owned artisanal distilleries as authentic advocates of Italian culture. Grappa di Picolit became a fashionable drink in high social circles and by 1978 was commanding a premium price in Italy and abroad. Even the renowned wine commentator Gianni Brera (1979), who only a few years earlier had publicly ridiculed grappa, admitted, ''Long since was Giannola greeting me with exquisite gifts of emblematic flasks: on my part I also gifted them away. Then, I learned the prices, and felt an acute remorse. Four–five times the price of a normal whisky. Are we crazy? Therefore, even I tasted it!''

Grappa di Picolit falsified the assumption that grappa was of low quality and status, and the Noninos were soon followed by an emerging community of purists, such as Romano Levi (founded in 1924) and Luigi Barile (founded in 1979), who used artisanal methods to distill their variants of grappa monovitigno (single-grape grappa) and for the first time were able to command premium prices. The Noninos' rivals adopted new stylish packaging, single-varietal grape spirits, explicit association with family and artisanship, and even, in one case, the use of an award. In 1984 the Noninos gained regulatory permission to directly distill grapes, a method immediately copied by Italo Maschio, which refined and popularized it.

The association of grappa with wine intensified in the 1980s. Grappa Segnana, for example, was acquired in 1985 by Ferrari Brut, producer of Italy's most famous high-quality champagne, as part of a strategy to reinforce the association between the worlds of grappa and wine. But such was the success of single-grape grappa that demand continued to grow regardless of whether it

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was labeled monovitigno, provided it was artisanal. By the mid-2000s, single-grape grappa would represent about one quarter of retail sales of grappa and significantly more in the premium hotel, restaurant, and café market (Centro Documentazione Grappa Luigi Bonollo, 2005). Moreover, the social preference for artisanal methods reached the point that even non-single-grape grappa was accepted into the pantheon of spirits.

Not all grappa was of premium quality. The mass production distillers still produced a low-status version and intensified their TV advertisements, a strategy that would prove ruinous by the late 1980s. Prices for their non-premium grappa ranged from 2,000 lire per 75cl, and the median was 3,500 lire (Veronelli, 1978). In contrast, the 27 artisanal distilleries classified as three-star by Veronelli (1978) commanded a median price of 7,000 lire for 75cl of their grappa. Grappa di Picolit was the clear outlier with a price of 26,000 for 25cl. Artisanal producers who did not produce premium grappa, caught between the mass producers and the premium-priced artisanal producers, either disappeared or tried to switch into the new category position created by Nonino. From 1974 to 1996 the number of distillers fell from 400 (in 1974) to 121, although the number had increased to 139 by 2009.

By the end of the 1980s, the premium subcategory of grappa had definitively emerged. In 1988 the renowned monthly magazine *Largo Consumo* celebrated the emergence of ''grappa di prestigio'' in the Italian spirits industry (quoted by Tiraforti, 1990: 157). Moreover, the value of grappa as a high-status spirit was no longer bound solely to the Nonino name. Although between 1984 and 2009 the Nonino name was mentioned 56 times by the business newspaper *Il Sole 24 Ore* (followed by Bottega, 23 times; Maschio, 20; and Nardini, 18), figure 7 shows that the number of articles citing the family noticeably declined over this period.

Interestingly, the Noninos adopted an uncooperative position within the field, resisting any attempts to water down their definition of quality standards. They collaborated with only a small number of purists, such as Giacosa, Nannoni, and Marolo, who supported the strict view on how grappa should be distilled. But after the breakthrough by the Noninos, most other artisanal players sought to advance and consolidate their collective interests by creating field-level agencies that could advance the interest for grappa and lobby for supportive regulations. In 1982 the newly founded Italian association of grappa tasters instituted the yearly award Alambicco d'Oro. In 1990, Luigi Odello established the Tasters' Study Center and the related tasters' magazine *L'Assaggio*, which was the catalyst for the founding of other regional employers' associations. Six years later, the National Association of Grappa Producers was founded and was used by the artisanal movement to successfully lobby for legislation that would define subcategories of grappa. In 1997 regulations specified that only grappa distilled in and using grapes from Italy could be called grappa. Moreover, labels could indicate the origin of the grapes if they were named by EU regulation CE 1576/1989, i.e., Grappa di Barolo, Grappa del Piemonte, Grappa della Lombardia, Grappa del Trentino, Grappa del Friuli, Grappa del Veneto, and Südtiroler Grappa. Regulations also specified that ''old'' grappa was to age at least 12 months and ''aged'' grappa for at least 18 months. In 1989 and 2008, EU regulations protected grappa as a purely Italian denomination.

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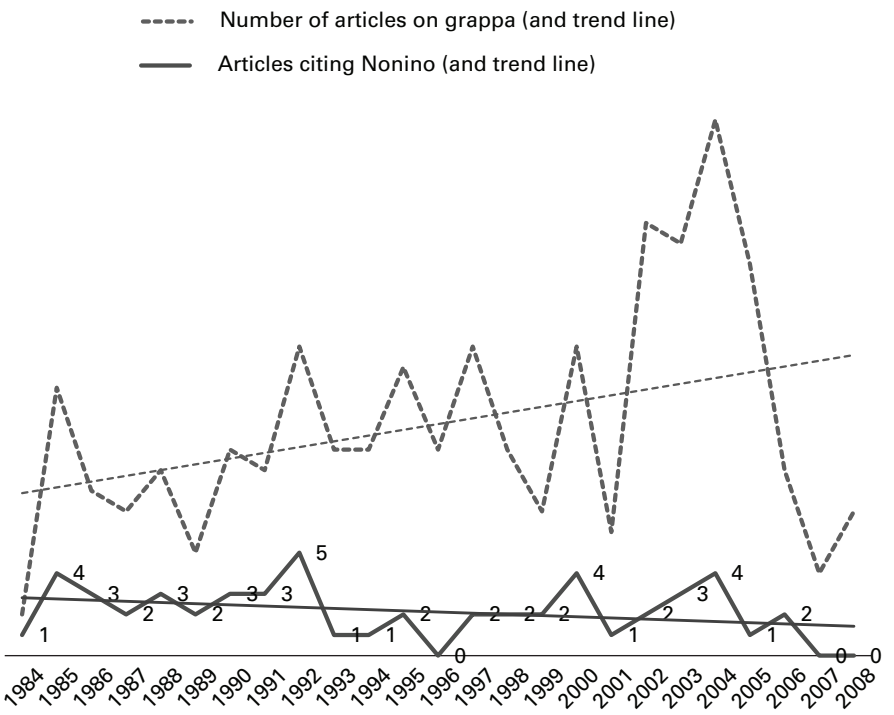
Figure 7. Number of articles on grappa and those citing Nonino in *Il Sole 24 Ore* (1984–2009).



The acceptance of premium grappa was reflected in its sales and price trajectory and in the contrasting fortunes of mass producers and regional artisans. The price of premium quality, single-grape, and aged grappa reached more than €2,000 per bottle (Torazza, 2010). Further, even though sales of grappa per se declined from a high of 227,600 hectolitres in 1975 to 100,000 hl per year in 1990, the sales of artisanal distillations increased. According to Nielsen data, high-priced quality grappa moved from a 0-percent share of the grappa market in 1975 to 45 percent by 1997 (Compagno, 2000: 151) and by 2005 was estimated to have reached 55 to 60 percent (Centro Documentazione Grappa Luigi Bonollo, 2005).

The growing social acceptance of grappa as a legitimate alternative to foreign spirits also led to an increase in its share of the spirits market. If we consider only the sales of grappa, whisky, and brandy/cognac, for which comparable figures are available (Balliano and Lanzetti, 1976; Compagno, 2000), the market share of grappa grew from 38 percent in 1973 to 41 percent in 1997 (despite a fall in the early 1990s resulting from the decline of the mass producers and artisans who did not switch into the premium category), that of whisky grew from 24 to 31 percent, and brandy and cognac fell from 38 to 28 percent. There was also an increase in the number of grappa consumers from 4.6 million in 1980 to 8 million in 2006, despite a contraction of the spirits market as a whole (Venturini, 1987; Odello, 1995; Assodistil, 2009). Not all of these consumers were purchasing premium grappa, but the combination of the significant rise in their number and the substantial market share of premium

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grappa is a further indication that the portrayal of grappa as a poor spirit had been abandoned.

The Noninos were publicly fêted for their accomplishments. Giannola was knighted with the title of Cavaliere del Lavoro by the president of the Italian Republic, and Giannola and Benito were awarded the prestigious Leonardo Prize for their service ''. . . as the true Ambassadors for Italian Grappa throughout the world'' (*Italia a Tavola*, 2010). Grappa has been lauded in the media as an exemplary Italian cultural product and ''lo spirito nazionale'' (national spirit), and its consumption is no longer associated with lowly social practices but with ''an existential approach focused on tasting and enjoying rather than on gobble and fill'' (Finzi, 2007: 27). Significantly, its consumption became socially acceptable for women, younger adults, and the higher social classes (Finzi, 2007). Artisanal firms are proclaimed as proudly upholding the traditions and innovations of Italian culture, as evidenced in the media, e.g., ''Journey to the court of queen pomace'' (*Il Sole 24 Ore*, 1985), ''Grappa crosses the English Channel and challenges whisky'' (*Il Sole 24 Ore*, 1986), ''Ancient alembics and winning strategies reward grappa'' (*Il Sole 24 Ore*, 1996), ''Grappa defeats whisky'' (*La Stampa*, 1997), ''The University of Grappa is born''*(La Stampa*, 2004), and ''Magic grappa leaves behind vodka for the Russians'' (*La Stampa*, 2007). Opinion leaders, such as Luigi Odello, have applauded grappa's new status:

> In the 1980s there was an abandonment of *xenomania*, which for years had characterized the preference for whisky (the spirit for career oriented people) and cognac (the spirit for meditation by the fire, perfect for evenings among older business men). Grappa proposed itself as the spirit for those who wanted to distinguish themselves claiming specific values: selective rescue of tradition, back to the origins, ideal connection with the healthy rural society. (Odello, field notes, Nov. 12, 2009)

Surveys now regularly find grappa, more so even than whisky or cognac, associated with social and cultural practices that symbolize ''education, hedonistic sophistication, elegance'' (Finzi, 2007: 31). The successful emergence of high-status grappa has not only led to an extension of the grappa category but also changed how the parent category of grappa is regarded. Between the late 1980s and the late 1990s, the status of premium grappa became comparable to that of whisky and cognac; by the 2000s, the status of lower-priced grappa was no longer below that of other spirits.

Critically, although cheap grappa still exists, the cognitive referent for the grappa category—what Italians and foreigners think of when they think of grappa—is no longer a poor-quality cheap spirit associated with the ''greasy spoon'' and regarded with emotional distaste; instead, they think of grappa as a premium spirit associated with sophisticated social practices (personified by the Noninos) that exemplify ''the taste of Italy'' (Virbila, 1987). Much in the way that cognac and whisky are associated with France and Scotland, Italians now proudly associate grappa with the prestige of their country. The story of grappa, in other words, is that of a metamorphosis ''from a Cinderella into a queen'' within the aristocracy of spirits (Apple, 1997: F4).

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DISCUSSION

What does the above account tell us about status recategorization? Before addressing this question, it is worth summarizing the ''dependent variable'' of our story—the change in meaning, value, and status of the grappa category vis-à-vis other categories of spirits. At the outset, grappa was no more than *grappa1.* Despite the existence of high-quality products, no sophisticated subsystem of definitions had developed; it was just a white or colored spirit for a brief and harsh alcoholic experience. No lexicon for describing its smell and taste had emerged, and no complex social practices were associated with its consumption beyond its use in greasy spoons or mountain huts or as an almost magical medicine for the poor (Venturini, 1987). It remained firmly locked into *grappa1*, pinned down to its mundane materiality by the status imperative imposed by its socio-cultural position in society. In Hofstadter and Sander's (2013: 187) terms, its horizontal ''category extension'' remained tiny. In sharp contrast, cognac and whisky implied a highly refined taste and quality associated with rich, high-status social practices. These categories had climbed the abstraction ladder to *cognac3* and *whisky3*. To enjoy this kind of spirit during social gatherings meant conversing about politics, high culture, and the qualities of the spirit while leisurely smelling and sipping the cognac or whisky—but not grappa. Until, that is, grappa moved to *grappa3*, becoming synonymous with elegance and sophistication and associated with the social practices of what would later become the Slow Food lifestyle. ''Let's have a single varietal grappa'' began to mean an after-dinner practice of pouring from elegant bottles, sipping and discerning taste nuances, and enjoying a self-conception of Italians as lovers of tradition and the beauty of ''healthy rural society'' (Odello, field notes, Nov. 12, 2009).

The recategorization of grappa in figure 1 above shows the horizontal and vertical status ordering before and after change took place. Before, foreign spirits collectively constituted a separate high-status class, the club to which grappa could not have access. After, the horizontal classification domestic/foreign had dissolved, grappa had joined the club, and the vertical status positions available for category members stretched to the top of the overall class of spirits. Our findings highlight three mechanisms by which this status change was effected: category detachment, category emulation, and category sublimation. These mechanisms, together, constitute ''theorization by allusion,'' which is particularly relevant for changes that involve status.

Three Mechanisms of Theorization by Allusion

Category detachment. This is the distancing of a social object, in our case Grappa di Picolit, from its existing category. It is the presentation and signaling of an object in such a way that audiences have serious difficulty associating it with the meanings and practices of the undesired category. In the grappa case this was achieved in four significant and sustained ways.

First, the material appearance of the artifact itself, Grappa di Picolit, was fundamentally altered such that audiences could not easily recognize it as belonging to the low-status grappa category. In other words, there was an attempt at visually undermining the prevailing cognitive and social understandings. This emphasis on the appearance of the artifact contrasts with the linguistic

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emphasis of most previous accounts of theorization (e.g., Greenwood, Suddaby, and Hinings, 2002; King and Soule, 2007; King and Pearce, 2010; Jones et al., 2012). Our case thus resonates with the recent call for inclusion of ''the visual mode of meaning construction'' (Meyer et al., 2013: 490) but is different because the persuasive visual detachment of Grappa di Picolit was reached not only through aesthetic arrangements (the label, the bottle design, and the minimal use of colors) but also through embedding the physical object itself (its small bottle size and the flagon shape) into new high-status socio-cultural practices, such as after-dinner tasting rituals in restaurants and private homes. In Appadurai's (1986: 28) terms, there was a ''diversion'' of an object (i.e., the bottle reminiscent of a flagon in a perfume shop) into the ''unlikely context'' of grappa consumption.

Second, the disproportionately high price asked for Grappa di Picolit leveraged the symbolic meaning of price differentials. Price signals are not simply an economic act—they are a known mechanism for signaling a category's meaning and by which a ''category's identity and value [are] institutionalized'' (Khaire and Wadhwani, 2010: 1295). Changing a price, therefore, disturbs the ''webs of meaning'' within which a category is embedded (Velthuis, 2005: 11). In the grappa case, the dramatic price increase was an attempt to educate audiences on the appropriate value of the product and a statement of ''status aspiration'' (Kodeih and Greenwood, 2014: 34). In the socio-cultural domain to which the Noninos aspired—the world of art and culture—the relationship between status claims and price is particularly relevant because quality is difficult or impossible to ascertain (Malter, 2014). The disproportionately high price of grappa, therefore, was an explicit symbolic expression of detachment from a lowly category because the price increase was so unlikely that it attracted attention and generated puzzlement. Setting the price far beyond the consumer's ''latitude of acceptance'' runs counter to the established assimilation-contrast theory in marketing science, whereby price increases in luxury goods should occur in steps to avoid reaching the ''zone of rejection'' but in our case were successful only after a large leap (Anderson, 1973: 39; Sherif and Hovland, 1961). Significantly, the first Nonino failure had made use of a modest price increase that could have been considered within an acceptance zone but was rejected by the market.

Third, category detachment reaches beyond the product itself to the producer and the producer's relationships with others in the undesired market and organization category. The Noninos deliberately distanced themselves from other distillers and thus from the broader category of grappa and its traditional negative image, a pattern of behavior that echoes but rearranges Podolny's (2005) concept of status leakage, whereby high-status organizations risk status reduction if they are associated with low-status ones. Phillips and Kim (2009; see also Phillips and Owen, 2004; Phillips, 2013) highlighted deception as a means by which high-status actors avoid such risks. In a similar vein, low-status organizations that aspire to a higher-status position have to avoid being associated with fellow low-status category members.

Fourth, aware of the conditions of her previous failures, Giannola Nonino deliberately crafted a persona signally inconsistent with the traditional meaning of grappa as a low-status drink for men. Her visual appearance was a stylized personal performance conducted in high social and cultural settings and was

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intended to signify the novelty of her Grappa di Picolit. Highlighting the role of personal appearance in category detachment resonates with the linguist Cherry's (1988) assertion that credibility is not solely a function of how an argument is linguistically framed—an emphasis widely found within the institutional literature (Phillips and Oswick, 2012)—but of how the persuader, the carrier of the message, is presented. By creating such a visible persona, Nonino essentially packaged herself rather than, and in contrast to, the actual message, as found in previous studies (e.g., Elsbach and Sutton, 1992; Elsbach and Elofson, 2000).

Studies have previously suggested ideas similar to category detachment. Delmestri and Wezel (2011) found that, in Europe, the newly introduced category of multiplex cinemas adopted the appearance of the more socially acceptable movie theatre to reduce the risk that consumers would perceive the multiplex format as violating the ''cinema as culture'' experience. Ingram and Silverman (2012) showed how geographic distance concealed awareness of the slave trade from British society in the eighteenth century, enabling the trade to persist despite its violation of social and cultural norms. Joy (2009) similarly showed how the meat industry hid socially dubious practices both by locating animal factories and slaughterhouses in remote areas and by hiring temporary immigrant workers. Category detachment has similarities to these studies, but there is an important difference. Detachment is not a strategy of hiding an object; on the contrary, it is the deliberate appeal for attention, a frontal call for publicity in the attempt to signal difference from a derided category.

Category emulation. This mechanism is the presentation of a social object so that it hints at the practices of a different high-status category. Emulation signals the status being sought and by implication the status that is being claimed. In the grappa case this was achieved in two primary ways: first, by mimicking the visual appearance and practices of an alternative high-status category (French wine), and second, by engaging the market infrastructure of that alternative category. Visual signaling was achieved through using a single-varietal grape, highlighting the distiller's family, and labeling to disclose the region of origin—all of which are definitive practices of the French wine industry (Beverland, 2005; Malter, 2014). The Noninos scorned any use of traditional channels of distribution and turned to sommeliers in elite restaurants and sales agents of prestigious wines. Through these practices the Noninos implied the resemblance of Grappa di Picolit to fine wine, thereby intimating the similarity of meaning and status that audiences were being encouraged to see.

The mechanism of category emulation echoes the findings of Santos and Eisenhardt (2009), but the grappa story runs counter to their conclusion that drawing templates from ''very proximate markets makes it less likely that audiences will be intrigued'' (Santos and Eisenhardt, 2009: 652). In our case, the approach to category detachment is consistent with Santos and Eisenhardt's idea that difference attracts interest. But Grappa di Picolit mimicked a proximate, not distant, class of categories. The invoked comparison market was potentially close, but before its recategorization, nobody would have evaluated grappa as close to fine wine. Our suggestion is that status shifts in mature industries depend on the engagement and endorsement of audiences for whom potential proximity between categories makes drawing comparisons

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meaningful; in our case, both wine and grappa are made of grapes. Proximity enables comparison. Distant allusions, in contrast, could too easily be dismissed as irrelevant and overly fanciful and their advocates as ''irrelevant gadflies'' (Rao, Monin, and Durand, 2003: 815). Category emulation, in other words, has to be within the cognitive reach of authoritative audiences. Though category detachment involves heightening the difference of an object from its previous cognitive location (creating distance), category emulation points to the claimed status by appealing to a nearby location and its social practices.

Category sublimation. This mechanism, named for the Latin *sublimare* (''raise to a higher status''), is the shift from local, field-specific references to broader, societal-level frames. It is the process by which recategorization incorporates ''wider cultural material'' (Meyer, 2010: 15) and connects to broader legitimating narratives to enhance the likelihood of sustained change. In our case, sublimation was accomplished in two ways: first, by participating in the emerging reevaluation within Italy of the importance and meaning of traditional arrangements, especially artisanal processes and family governance, that attached the narrative of tradition to a new narrative of modernity; and, second, by connecting the Nonino name to wider socio-cultural practices.

The emerging narrative of traditional Italian culture challenged the industrial understanding of mass-produced quality by emphasizing the importance and authenticity of regional food and wine making. The push to recategorize grappa both leveraged and contributed to the growing new appreciation of domestic practices that represented and would, if adopted, revive those traditions, such as artisanal production, family ownership and management of firms, and the use of traditional regional varietals. Positioning grappa as an invocation of that wider cultural narrative served to more securely anchor and thus legitimate its claim to higher status. Proponents of Grappa di Picolit thus constantly referred to elements of Italian culture that, in the grappa context, had fallen into disrepute (such as artisanal family production) or were even illegal (the use of particular grapes) but that, in wider Italian society, had sustained islands of undisputed excellence, such as Murano glass production—especially the high-status Venini glass laboratories.

Connecting change to the refrain of tradition provides ''legitimating coherence with the old order'' (Misangyi, Weaver, and Elms, 2008: 762). But category sublimation also requires invoking modernity. As Hargadon and Douglas (2001: 476–478) pointed out, although actors, to get acceptance for their claims, need to locate proposed changes ''within the set of understandings and patterns of actions that constitute the institutional environment,'' they also need to distinguish their claim ''from what already exists.'' This was achieved in our case by linking Grappa di Picolit to the cultural movement of Milanese design and fashion that was emerging in the same years (Varacca Capello and Ravasi, 2009; Rindova, Dalpiaz, and Ravasi, 2011). The role of the Nonino family in not only riding but also creating this most peculiar of Italian cultural waves was consecrated in a dedicated exhibition held in 2003 by the Triennale di Milano, the Italian design museum. It was the first exhibit there ''that does not celebrate an artist, an architect, a designer, but a family'' (Bucci, 2003).

The second form of sublimation occurred through participation in an established societal means of status confirmation: prestigious award ceremonies.

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Prizes, awards, and ceremonies are an institutionalized means by which contemporary societies signal their normative order (Anand and Jones, 2008). They are a highly visible and socially accepted practice for displaying and thus reproducing societal-level cultural norms and systems of value. By promoting literary prizes, the Noninos successfully engaged with widening circles of social and cultural elites and received widespread media coverage. Interestingly, the award was not a means for establishing status hierarchies among the participants, most of whom already had high status. Nor was it a way by which members of the grappa field distributed prestige, resolved conflicts, and tightened horizontal links with each other (Anand and Watson, 2004), because the participants in the tournament ritual were not field members—a field-related award was established by the grappa tasters' association only in 1982. Furthermore, it was not primarily a method by which to ingratiate journalists (e.g., Barry and Fulmer, 2004; Westphal and Deephouse, 2011) nor a means to define and institutionalize what values do or do not count as legitimate (Lampel and Meyer, 2008), because the values of the literary world were enacted intact. Instead, the awards were intended to legitimate the organizer, with the material setting of the distillery playing ''a 'silent' but essential role'' (Monteiro and Nicolini, 2014: 74) by unobtrusively connecting Grappa di Picolit to those values.

Using Theorization by Allusion to Recategorize Status

The mechanisms of category detachment, category emulation, and category sublimation constitute a distinct form of theorization, which we label ''theorization by allusion,'' that is particularly appropriate for recategorization efforts involving shifts from low to high status. Status is a socially constructed attribute that draws heavily on the legitimacy of relationships and the reciprocation of claims to category membership (Washington and Zajac, 2005). Claims may be more readily and preemptively dismissed if they are deemed too fanciful and lacking in credibility, as happened to Nonino in 1968 and 1974. And claims to status through contested political means, such as those highlighted in studies of social movements (Benford and Snow, 2000), are also likely to be resisted because they openly threaten established interests and provoke contrary claims, as happened to the distillers Ramazzotti in 1970 (who portrayed the Fior di vite bottle talking with vodka and whisky bottles) and Modin in 1977 (who went bankrupt by directly mimicking the expensive practices of the high-status cognac category without being able to raise prices correspondingly because of rejections by critics and consumers).

Resistance is likely to be especially strong in mature contexts (Maguire, Hardy, and Lawrence, 2004). As Lounsbury and Rao (2004: 978) emphasized, ''. . . powerful incumbent producers within a product category seek to preserve their own dominance by lobbying field-level organizations such as industry media . . . [that] are often more receptive to powerful incumbents because they often rely on the endorsement and support of dominant players in order to sell their own products and services.'' Theorization by allusion avoids this triggering of direct contestation. The Noninos were careful not to openly confront incumbents and proponents of the existing status hierarchy. They did not try to directly compare Grappa di Picolit with cognac or whisky—i.e., with higher-status categories within the same superordinate category. Instead, all their

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efforts were made by allusion to neighboring categories, especially that of French wine.

Theorization by allusion is thus distinctive because it avoids or minimizes the brute clash of interests and the noisy, contested processes previously observed during status changes (Hardy and Maguire, 2008; King and Pearce, 2010). It resembles more the ''quiet theorization'' described by Smets, Morris, and Greenwood (2012) and the ''soft-power strategies'' of Santos and Eisenhardt (2009). And due to the prominent role of visual artifacts in this form of theorization, it builds on the capacity of a visual to ''objectify social arrangements'' by ''disguising itself as information, rather than argument'' (Meyer et al., 2013: 494) and also builds on the way that artifacts can become ''the Trojan horse of value shifts'' (Appadurai, 1986: 61). Theorization by allusion is an indirect, less contentious, and thus more subtle way of building claims for status enhancement.

Category detachment and category emulation may indeed reflect ''quiet'' theorization, but category sublimation through the appeal to wider social narratives may be difficult to achieve without more openly confronting institutionalized arrangements. For example, by associating themselves with the push for authenticity and the resurrection of Italian cultural tradition, the Noninos became publicly involved—with other artisanal distillers and advocates of a different cultural lifestyle—in the struggle against the proponents of mass production. It is thus an oversimplification to portray attempts to change the status of categories as a fully silent process. Category sublimation, intended to legitimate and anchor category change in higher-order frames of meaning, may inevitably generate more ''noise.'' But such struggles over meanings and values essentially occur outside the immediate field and involve a wider constellation of proponents. Moreover, the contestation arising from pursuing category sublimation may, in fostering the visibility of the issue, serve to draw attention to the claim being advanced. This observation echoes Bruner's (1991: 11) analysis that to be effective narratives require both ''canonicity'' and ''breach''—canonicity *to* established legitimate meanings and breach *from* the very ''canonical scripts'' that ground the narrative.

The combination of the three mechanisms gives theorization by allusion its traction and significance. The previous failed attempts at the status recategorization of grappa, compared in table 3 above, indicate this fact. The first Nonino failure included category detachment, by visual distancing alone, and a measure of category emulation. The attempt by Ramazzotti did not use any of the three mechanisms. The attempt by Modin, whose grappa was considered of high quality (Martegani, 1968), included modest aspects of detachment and sublimation. The second Nonino failure gave additional emphasis to category detachment and sublimation, but it was the third (and successful) effort that fully emphasized all three mechanisms. Our interpretation is that theorization by allusion requires all three mechanisms because each provides an essential element of the overall formula for success. Category detachment draws attention to how a phenomenon does not fit the existing category schema; it creates a problem for the observer. By itself, the problem would be a transgression that would trigger negative social and cognitive imperatives. But the cognitive difficulty in assigning the product to a predetermined status position may become an opportunity if it is accompanied by category emulation. Category emulation, in other words, provides a solution by indicating how the

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transgression can be classified and thus understood. Detachment and emulation together, therefore, lessen the risk of social punishments—the status imperative—being imposed. Detachment frees the product from the grip of its low-status category; emulation anchors it analogically to a proximate higher-status world and the practices that characterize it.

Even this is not enough, however. Because status classifications are difficult to change, recategorization is possible only if the claim is perceived as reasonable—i.e., as having legitimacy. As Podolny (2005: 103) commented, ''People are simply unable to filter out the broader context within which a message is situated.'' In theorization by allusion, category sublimation provides that context by anchoring change to higher-level cultural narratives and in so doing provides the necessary legitimacy. In other words, detachment alone would leave the observer confused and lead to the status imperative being imposed. Emulation and/or sublimation without detachment would be considered too fanciful and would also trigger the status imperative. Detachment and emulation together might be successful (we did not have an example in our case), but success is more likely if, as in the grappa case, the category is sublimated through the provision of convincing narratives and rituals. Categorical processes do not occur in a vacuum; they are embedded in a socio-cultural context that needs to be engaged and leveraged if a category's meanings and practices are to be changed.

Figure 8 summarizes our reasoning in a theoretical model. Theorization by allusion is used to sustain a category extension claim in two complementary directions. The claim to vertical extension is for a higher-status position of the category within the class to which it belongs. When accepted and endorsed by relevant audiences—in our case, prominent consumers, sommeliers in restaurants, wine critics, and journalists—vertical extension represents breaking what could be called a ''categorical glass ceiling.'' The claim to horizontal extension, meanwhile, is to encompass more and more abstract social practices, akin to Hofstadter and Sander's (2013) discussion of *coffee1, coffee2*, and *coffee3.* The horizontal breadth of the graphical representation in figure 8 signifies the extension and abstraction of social practices connected to the category. An important implication of our study is that vertical extension cannot be reached without a corresponding horizontal extension encompassing social practices that can be associated with the sought-after higher-status position. In other words, extension toward practices of equal status would not work. As displayed by arrow 2 in figure 8, a radical change in vertical status representing the upward movement of a category can be obtained only together with a complementary social deepening of a category's meaning—its horizontal extension—so as to encompass more complex and socially valued practices.

The theoretical model in figure 8 depicts the role of theorization by allusion in delineating and supporting the category extension claim. As emphasized above, all three mechanisms in conjunction are needed to support the claim (arrow 1). Category detachment addresses the vertical status imperative through visual, personal, and organizational distancing and horizontal extension by the material affordances (opportunities for action) inscribed in objects. Category emulation directly addresses status by symbolically referring to a different high-status category and also addresses the extension of meaning through importing the social practices attached to that same category. Finally, category sublimation, while contributing to the overall claim, more directly

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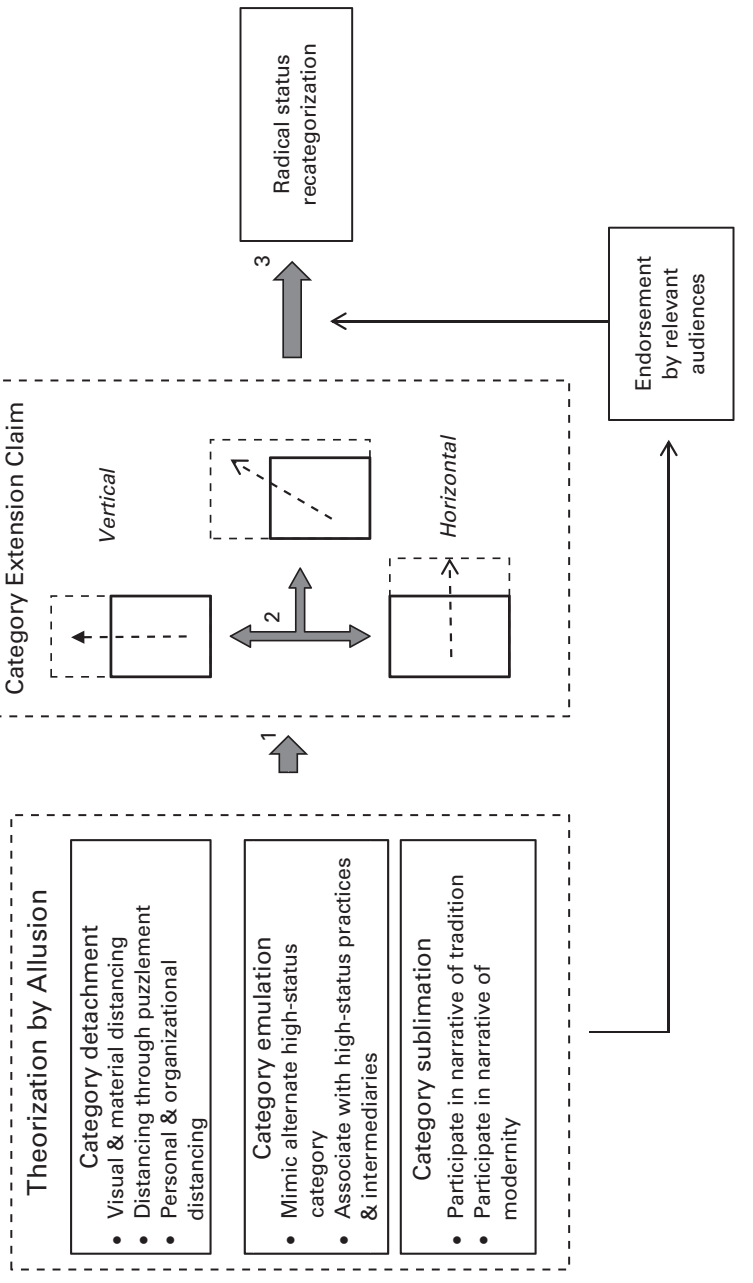

Figure 8. Theoretical model: Category extension claim through theorization by allusion.

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addresses audiences by narratively building the case and thus reinforcing the other two mechanisms in generating legitimacy for the claimant and the claim. Only if the horizontal and vertical category extension claim receives the endorsement of the relevant audiences (arrow 3) can radical status recategorization be achieved.

In presenting our model, we have emphasized the role of theorization by allusion in effecting status change, but theorization by allusion in the grappa case was predicated on earlier improvements in quality. There were also ongoing marginal incremental improvements. By itself, high quality might not elicit status change, but it is likely a prerequisite for successful theorization. What our story clearly shows, however, is that even a high-quality product won't be recognized as such if it is associated with a low-status category.

Contributions

We aspired to understand how radical status recategorization might occur in mature contexts in which the demands of status imperatives are pressingly felt. We have defined status recategorization as a process by which a social category is reclassified into a new or different class (in our case that of foreign spirits) and its scope extended to encompass a higher range of status positions for members of the category. Our primary contribution is to the literature on categories, which has begun to incorporate status into analyses of category dynamics. We have explored the recently introduced vertical dimension of category classifications and in particular the status of the category in which an organization and its products are embedded. In doing so, we have identified a form of theorization—theorization by allusion—that is particularly relevant for status change in a mature context because of its singular avoidance of contestation and resistance. We have specified its three mechanisms and explained their relationships. To our knowledge, this is the first empirical study that treats status category change as the dependent variable.

We do not claim that this form of theorization is the only option in these contexts. Rao, Monin, and Durand's (2003) account of the emergence of nouvelle cuisine in France offers an interesting contrast. The study shows a process of theorization that was much more open than the ''quiet'' theorization of the grappa case. Moreover, nouvelle cuisine's proponents had ''received honors from the French state and . . . plaudits from the *Guide Michelin*'' and were ''at the center of the French culinary world'' (Rao, Monin, and Durand, 2003: 804). Theorization by allusion is thus not the only means by which institutional change involving status might occur. But the grappa and nouvelle cuisine cases taken together suggest who may or may not practice theorization by allusion. In the grappa story the Noninos and the other artisanal distillers lacked sufficient sociopolitical resources for a more open challenge to the status quo, so theorization by allusion was the feasible option. That option would be less relevant for elites. In the nouvelle cuisine case the proponents of change commanded significant resources and were less restricted in the openness of their actions. In addition, it would be difficult for elite players to successfully deploy theorization by allusion because their actions are typically more visible and monitored. Theorization by allusion is thus likely to be associated with peripheral but not elite actors in a mature industry.

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Theorization by allusion draws heavily on the visual and the material, as well as the linguistic. Previous studies, in contrast, have focused on the persuasive use of language: Suddaby and Greenwood (2005) identified five forms of rhetoric deployed by proponents and opponents of institutional change and observed how their respective theorizations differed in rhetorical composition; Jones et al. (2012) uncovered linguistic patterns within the arguments of architects holding different visions of modern architecture; and Smets, Morris, and Greenwood (2012) discerned how lawyers in a global law firm theorized their ''normative orientation'' by discursively prioritizing some audiences over others. Our account complements these and similar studies (e.g., Maguire, Hardy, and Lawrence, 2004; Lounsbury and Crumley, 2007; David, Sine, and Haveman, 2013) by showing how categories are not articulated and instantiated solely through linguistic means but are also conveyed through materiality and appearance. Thus our second contribution is empirical confirmation that ''visual rhetoric and visual framing are central parts of the strategic repertoire of culturally skilled entrepreneurs'' (Meyer et al., 2013). Moreover, in circumstances that call for avoiding contestation, the persuasive rhetoric of visuals and the silent, unobtrusive role of material objects may be more appropriate than the use of language.

A third contribution echoes a theme discussed by Phillips and Kim (2009): the legitimation of a radical innovation (early lowbrow jazz) though association with highbrow practices (orchestral rendering). It is widely accepted that ''an actor's status is a direct function of the average status of an actor's affiliates'' (Podolny and Phillips, 1996: 453), and considerable attention has been given to how legitimacy (Jensen, 2010) and status are achieved by associating with high-status others (e.g., Baum and Oliver, 1991). The primary mechanism involved in status gain is the ''accumulation of positive association'' (Washington and Zajac, 2005: 283). This mechanism, however, has become identified as relying on the organizations and actors with whom one has ties. These associations may take place within particular settings, such as Washington and Zajac's (2005) study of sports teams being invited to the NCAA basketball tournament, but the emphasis is clearly on the actors with which the status-seeking organization associates. Our case, in contrast, is a reminder that affiliations with social practices that express and reproduce the desired status are also crucial. Status is embedded in social practices, much like valuation is rooted in social practice (Muniesa, 2011; Lamont, 2012). In the grappa case, to secure detachment from its low-status category grappa had to break from any association with undesired practices and successfully connect to those that are intrinsically associated with the desired status—hence Nonino's consistent placing and display of Grappa di Picolit exclusively in high-status settings and at elite and sophisticated cultural occasions, and its signaling of the use of high-status practices associated with fine wine. Being with another organization is part of the story, and being in appropriate social places is another. The mechanism of association is activated not solely by connections to other actors but also by being visible within and through institutionalized practices that convey status and higher value.

Future Research

Our analysis is developed from one case study, and further work is required to elaborate and validate (or disconfirm) our propositions. Our research design did

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not allow us to definitively ascertain whether the three identified mechanisms are additive or complementary or are of equal salience. From the previous failed attempts to change the status of grappa we deduce that category emulation alone is insufficient and that it is implausible that status recategorization could occur without also applying category detachment and category sublimation. But understanding their relative salience awaits further research. Does emphasis on one compensate for only modest attention to the other? The evidence from our case—especially the three failed attempts—suggests that all three mechanisms are necessary, but further work in different contexts would be profitable. We also need to learn more about the sequencing of category detachment and category emulation. Although these are discrete mechanisms—one can occur without the other—it would be interesting to learn whether their respective timing and/or duration are important.

Two other possible scope conditions warrant attention. The recategorization of grappa was enabled by a receptive social context. There was an awakening desire for an Italian cultural lifestyle, which would bloom later into the Slow Food Movement. Much as Rao, Monin, and Durand (2003) emphasized how societal-level shifts enable field-level change, our case was similarly enabled—although the Noninos were active and consecrated members of this movement. It would be interesting to learn whether theorization by allusion is possible only in such a receptive context. In a more forbidding setting, perhaps a greater measure of direct contestation would be inevitable. Second, our case clearly indicates an institutional entrepreneur working strategically and raises the question of whether theorization by allusion depends on the presence of such an actor. Could theorization by allusion arise from the more distributed, relatively unplanned, bottom-up processes described by Smets, Morris, and Greenwood (2012)? We suspect not—the presence of an institutional entrepreneur seems to be a necessary, although not sufficient, condition for sustained change—but this possible scope condition needs further research.

Paraphrasing Lawrence, Hardy, and Phillips (2002), the focus and outcome of our case was a ''proto'' status category that created a beachhead for others to enter. The Nonino family falsified the institutionalized belief that grappa was low quality and low status and provided a revised interpretation of the grappa category. Yet, as Khaire and Wadhwani (2010: 1283) rightly pointed out, ''emergence is not always followed by stabilization''—it requires ''institutional consolidation.'' Hence, although for pragmatic purposes we restricted our analysis to the early phase of the recategorization process, our case suggests that future research into how status shifts in categories become stabilized and entrenched is necessary. After the premium subcategory had been established, some producers successfully claimed artisanal identities even though they were using undetected, non-artisanal methods. The ensuing competition between pragmatists and purists (exemplified by the Noninos) spurred successful product innovations, such that in the 1990s some producers started to directly and successfully attack whisky and cognac by offering an aged version of grappa. In effect, they were advancing a kind of theorization by direct confrontation, which suggests that the mechanisms supporting change during an emergent phase may significantly differ from those deployed in the consolidation stage. Is theorization by allusion successful and appropriate only for the initial stage of change, or does it play a role in consolidation? What other mechanisms might follow in the consolidation stage? And what is the role of competition in the

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consolidation of a market category? Pursuing these lines of research should elaborate and nuance our understanding of the social rules that define the construction and stability of status hierarchies and of the mechanisms by which they might be changed. Understanding these dynamics matters because they are fundamental to the institutionalization of privilege. As Sauder, Lynn, and Podolny (2012: 277) recently concluded, ''we still have much to learn.''

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